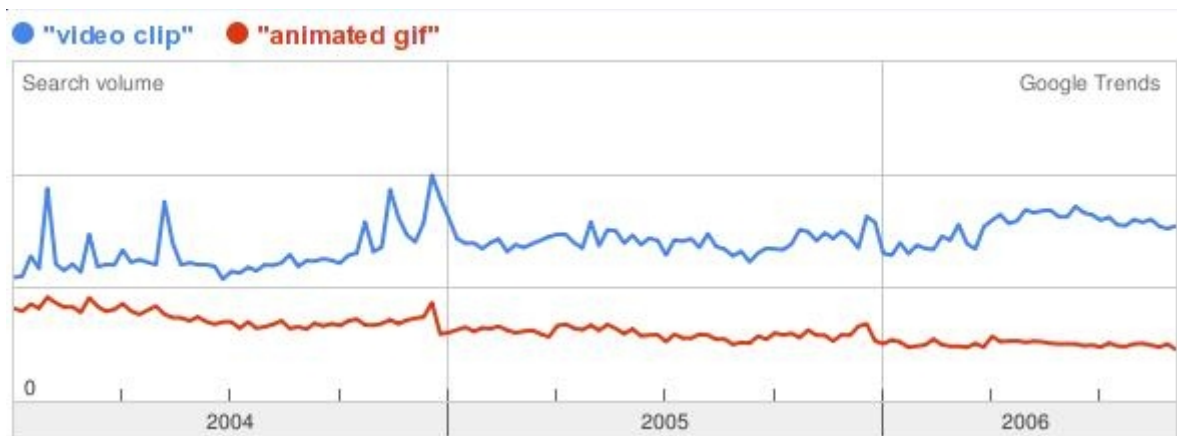


An Internet crystal ball: Google Trends

Now you can say that you saw it coming. Combining two search terms with increasing popularity can help discover new ones that are just born and grow very quickly.

It doesn't seem possible to anticipate changes in Internet. The net is so large and complex and it is evolving so fast that even the creators of sites like [Myspace](#) couldn't imagine how successful their services would become when they conceived them.

In fact, many success stories in Internet are the result of the survival of the fittest. Let's see an example. Multimedia is everywhere nowadays, helped by the availability of powerful computers and broadband connections. Most Internet users are getting familiar to downloading and watching video clips on-line. These rich media are replacing animated gifs as the favorite graphics vehicle for web designers. It is as if the once-popular animated gif format was now becoming gradually obsolete to the eyes of Internet users. The proof? Tools like Google Trends help you visualize how often a number of search terms have been searched for on Google over time. You just need to enter "animated gif" in Google Trends and compare the result with the trend for the search phrase "video clip":



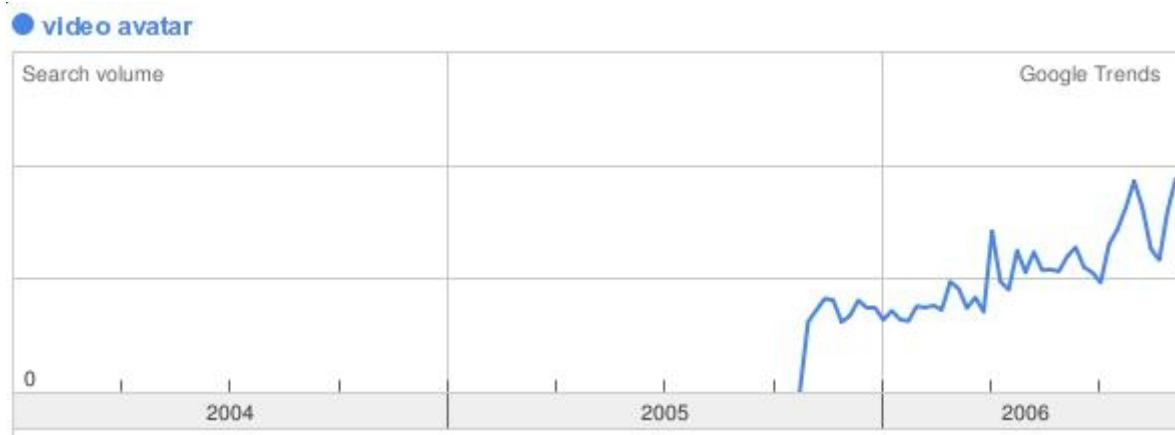
This [graph](#) was generated by entering the phrases "video clip" and "animated gif" separated by a comma ("video clip","animated gif"). The blue line is the frequency of searches of the topic 'video clip' and the red one, how often 'animated gif' is searched for. The graph is plotted on a linear scale so is it clear that one is more searched for than the other, and increasingly so.

How to discover new popular search terms

Now you don't need to be a particularly intuitive individual to see some changes coming in Internet. It may be possible to find new search phrases that are just born and grow very quickly by combining in Google Trends two existing and popular search topics. Pick one or more terms (words) of one phrase and other terms (words) of the other phrase and put them together. You only need to make sure that your combinations of words is a search phrase that exists, that it is increasingly searched for and whose combination of terms makes sense.

So far in this article we have identified 'video clip' as a phrase getting more and more searches. Another term growing in popularity is 'avatar'. Avatars are graphics that users upload to Internet forums and instant messaging programs to identify themselves. We can combine our previous examples to see what happens. Now, is there such a thing as a '**video avatar**'? Yes, there is! It happens to be a topic that has just began to be searched for so frequently that Google Trends is

now analyzing it:



Not only '**video avatar**' began to be searched for recently, but also it has an ascending [line](#). The trend is significantly more peaky than the lines of its parents 'video clip' and 'avatar'. New popular phrases usually start their lives with volumes of searches a few orders of magnitude smaller than their parents'. Their behavior is also more sensitive.

Limitations of the tool

Google Labs warn that their tool doesn't measure the overall interest in a topic, but the users' propensity to search for that topic on Google. However, since the engine still retains almost half of the market share of searches in Internet, the results can be said to be a good indicator of all that was and is searched for on-line when the tool is used to compare trends between topics for long periods of time. We are also assuming for simplicity sake that the terms "[video avatar](#)" and the phrase "[video AND avatar](#)", as well as their plural variants, have almost identical trends.

Intuition can be replaced to some extent by an iterative process of guess and check. You can compare any topics regardless of whether there is a conceptual correlation between them both, for instance one topic being substitutive of or complementary to the other, like "renewable energy" and "fossil fuel", or not. You just need to remember that the graphs just help you visualize and compare trends at large scale and only from a sample of the total of Google searches. You must keep in mind that Google doesn't reveal the real number of total web pages crawled at a given time anymore. The size of the sample used to create their graphs is also unknown. If you need to gear up to the next level in your Internet and marketing research, there are other tools that allow you to get estimations of numbers of searches for each particular keyword.

Tool to be handled with imagination

This process of finding new search topics with growing interest can be extended to virtually anything with a potential market value, like new products or services, or even to new concepts and ideas. If you are lucky, you can anticipate mass phenomena and newly-coined search terms. You don't need to be an expert to uncover variations of on-line interests in almost real time. You can now compare a number of interesting topics and phrases and, who knows, maybe you witness a baby star being born!

About the author

Ruben Martinez is a founder of Imathon, the company behind [Image-me](#), the first service that creates video avatars from digital pictures of user's faces.